



December 2023

A message from the Mayor



Seasons greetings and welcome to December's Town Council newsletter. It's great to see the display of Christmas lights in Berwick going down so well on Facebook and other social media. I'd like to say a huge thanks to everyone involved; the contractors, Steve Monks and Simon Landels, for their work installing the motifs and fittings. The volunteers from Berwick Rotary for their work getting the Christmas tree in place and for organising their Christmas Market. The Town Council staff who co-ordinate the installation, the events and making sure the bills get paid. Northumberland County Council and their street lighting staff for problem solving and supporting the work the

Contractors do and, lastly, all the people on Facebook sharing their pics and showing off how good Berwick looks.

The month kicked off with a cold snap and sadly we felt it necessary to cancel the Countdown to Christmas event on Friday December 1st, when we had planned to sing carols and welcome Christmas in outside the Town Hall. The event was intended to coincide with the late shopping night, organised by the Chamber of Trade. Despite the freeze, over 30 local businesses stayed open and welcomed shoppers into the evening. The event has been hailed a success, in no small part to the hardy nature of Berwick folk!

The end of this month is the deadline to enter nominations for our annual Mayor's Award when we celebrate the achievements of Berwickers who have made exceptional contributions to our community or have achieved, excelled or done something outstanding.

Details of how to get involved are on the back cover of this newsletter and we would be delighted to receive your nominations. The awards ceremony will take place in March, the date is still to be confirmed.

Finally I would like to take the opportunity, on behalf of the Berwick Town Council and its officers, to wish you all a merry Christmas and hopefully a better new year.

John Robertson
Mayor of Berwick-upon-Tweed



Berwick Neighbourhood Police Team News

Christmas Drink and Drug Drive Campaign

With the busy Christmas period upon us, Berwick Neighbourhood and Response Policing Teams will be supporting the Force-wide drink and drug driving campaigns as always. We appreciate it's the time of year to celebrate and would like everyone to enjoy the festivities safely. Officers in the area will be increasing patrols and routinely stopping motorists to carry out checks. Local Officers carry drugs testing kits and offences and charges for drug driving in the area are increasing. Please don't be tempted to either drink or take drugs and drive. It may not be just your own life you are ruining.

Staying safe on nights out this Christmas

Please look after yourselves and your friends on nights out by following the advice below:

- Make sure your phone is charged before you go out.
- Keep a small amount of money in your clothing, just in case you lose your purse or wallet.
- Stay with your friends: do not allow anyone to leave alone, or with someone they don't know or trust.
- Never leave your drink unattended.
- Let people know where you are going and your expected

Berwick Mini Police

Berwick NPT welcomed a new cohort of Mini Police from Holy Trinity First School at a recent 'Promise to Serve' ceremony that was attended by the Town Mayor. The team have already been deployed on Remembrance Day and will soon be deploying with speed guns to carry out local speed checks. We have lots of other exciting things planned for the year. Please give them your support if you see them out and about.

All the very best to you all for Xmas and New Year,

A/Sgt 953 Darren Robson

Berwick Neighbourhood Policing Team



Have you ever thought of being a Town Councillor?

VACANCIES

Exciting opportunity to make a difference in your community! It is a great time to get involved! Berwick Town Council currently has vacancies for new members to join our team and share your skills and enthusiasm with the community. We are looking for members who have a passion for our community and are willing to help by creating or supporting local projects and initiatives.

Will it take up all my time?

No! All of our members are volunteers with a passion for the community. There are 8 Town Council meetings per year to run through Council business and make decisions. These are supported by the Town Clerk who delivers much of the day to day business for the council such as preparing the paperwork and agenda for each meeting, acting as the responsible financial officer and providing advice to the

members as necessary. For those who are interested in specific issues, we have committees for Communities and Local Services, Budget and Administration, Planning and Staffing.

How can I find out more?

If you'd like to find out more about being a Councillor, please contact our Town Clerk Gareth Davies at town.clerk@berwick-tc.gov.uk. Gareth can also put you in touch with current Town Councillors if you would like an informal chat about the role.

Please note: In order to apply, you must be at least 18 and qualify by meeting one of the following criteria:

- you are on the register of electors
- you are an owner or tenant of land or property within the Council's area
- your main or only place of work during the preceding 12 months has been in the Council's area; or
- you have resided in the Council's area for at least

Grant Awards

The Council aims to promote and protect the quality of life and well-being of those who live in, work in, or visit the local area. To this end, the Council offer grants to local organisations based in, or providing services to the locality, to help them maintain and develop their services, facilities, and activities. Grants are available throughout the year and applications are invited up to the value of £2500 per application. To apply, please look at the Grants Awarding criteria and fill in the Grant Application Form on our website (www.berwick-tc.gov.uk/grant-schemes).

A recent example of a grant awarded by Council was to Greener Berwick to support their Repair Cafe Initiative. Repair Cafés are workshops organised to repair broken household items together, instead of throwing them away. It's a friendly, social space, with a strong sense of common purpose and it's exactly the kind of community initiative that the Council is glad to support. Here's a letter we received after the grant was issued that demonstrates just how important a grant can be to help an organisation get their plans moving:

Dear Gareth,

On behalf of Greener Berwick and the Repair Cafe Team, please could you convey our deepest thanks to the Berwick Town Council Committee for agreeing to provide us with £1536.44 towards the further development of our Repair Cafe Project. This will be such a help towards ensuring that the Repair Cafe Project can continue to grow. It is already proving to be popular with local residents and is now listed on the International Repair Cafe website. <https://www.repaircafe.org/en/cafe/berwick-upon-tweed-repair-cafe/>

Receiving your grant has provided the funding needed for Phase One of the Repair Cafe Project, to develop it over the next 6 months. Applying for your grant also gave us the confidence boost to seek further funding to expand the Project for Phase Two, so on the back of this, we have since made a successful application to NCC's Environment and Climate Fund. This will cover a further 6 months for the Repair Cafe and will include the initial development of the Tool Library & Library of Stuff plus storage. This storage will also be used to store gardening equipment for the Community Growing Group, which is currently re-planting beds within Berwick.

It is all looking very positive and is going in the right direction. Tania and I are very grateful to you and Julian for your support and advice with the initial planning phase of our proposal and also for the Town Council financially supporting us in the development of the Repair Cafe, as part of our Zero Waste Vision.

*Many kind regards
Greener Berwick*

The next Repair Café will be held on Saturday, 27 January 2024 10:00am to 1:00pm at the Salvation Army Hall.

Town Planting



The plans for planting around town are well underway and we aim to build on our first attempt this year. One of our innovations will be that the Council will be growing its own bedding plants from plugs, rather than fuller grown plants. Not only will this reduce our carbon impact it will reduce the costs involved in planting. We've rented a piece of land from NCC at the Ramparts, near to our depot and we will be installing poly-tunnels in the new year in preparation for planting up in the spring.

Around Town



You may see some odd bits of equipment attached to lamp-posts and street signs. These are passive monitoring devices for nitrogen dioxide gas. These are exposed for approximately one month and swapped on a given date for another, year round. The tubes are sent to a laboratory which determines the nitrogen dioxide concentration at the tube's location for the period it is exposed. They are installed by NCC as part of our their requirements to monitor and report on air quality within Northumberland.

Council Audit 2023

Whenever concerns are raised about the standards of our work at the Town Council, we take them seriously. It's absolutely right that we are scrutinized, audited and challenged. It's our job to respond to those challenges. Sometimes those challenges aren't always easy to follow, sometimes the facts get lost. Want an example? A local publication recently reported that we handle £1m a year. We don't – they got to that figure by double counting income received and cash in hand – but that's a good example of how confusing our finances can be, and why we have to be open and honest.

We got our Internal Audit report for 2022-23 in June. We published it, and reported it to council. We went further. As soon as we were aware there were issues (with the Asset Register) we told council's Budget and Administration committee about them, even before we had the report, and explained what we'd done to deal with them. What went wrong with the Assets Register? Council moved offices during the year, and some items of redundant furniture were disposed of. How they were disposed of, and how it was recorded, was not done well, but the Internal Auditor reported that the difference was not material to the total value of the assets.

Overall, the Internal Auditor concluded that they had "satisfied [them]selves with the standard of the accounting records and internal controls throughout the accounting period and that's why they signed off the Internal Audit part of our Annual Return.

The issue with the External Auditors was more significant. Each year we have to fill in an Annual Return. We're expected to make adjustments to the figures for Income and Expenditure if, as sometimes happens, we pay in advance for goods that won't be delivered until the next financial year, or we receive income that we're not actually owed until the next year (like an allotment tenant paying two years rent in advance, for instance).

The Annual Return doesn't allow for these sorts of adjustments, so we have to do some accountancy work in the background. In the past this has been sufficient to satisfy our External Auditors but this year they didn't accept this and there were prolonged discussions about how this should have been reported. Unfortunately this to and fro led to us missing the deadline with regard to submitting evidence.

We're sorry that happened, and we take full responsibility for it. It doesn't mean that the conclusions of the Internal Audit reports are wrong; it means we have to work harder to provide documents in the format the Auditors ask of us.

Part of the process of being better at this, is to bring in new Internal Auditors who will give us two reports a year, and who specialise in Parish Councils. Their Interim conclusion for 2023-24 is 'Having reviewed the Council, I believe they are at a high standard whilst there is always room for continuous improvement even in a high standard Town Council.' Those are the standards we will continue to work towards.

More on our website: www.berwick-tc.gov.uk/berwick-news



MAYOR'S AWARD

We're holding our annual celebration of achievement and excellence in Berwick in March 2024. It's your chance to help us identify Berwickers who have done something special. Do you know someone who has achieved, excelled or done something outstanding?

Would you like to nominate that special someone local for the Mayors Award for Achievement in 2024?

Please send your nomination, with details of why you think they should win to assistant@berwick-tc.gov.uk. Please include your name, address, email and contact number and send us your nominations by 31st December.

Get an Email Newsletter

Make sure you get a copy every month by joining our mailing list. Simply email info@berwick-tc.gov.uk and ask to be added. Next month's newsletter will turn up in your inbox at the beginning of the month.

Contact the Town Council

You can email us at info@berwick-tc.gov.uk or telephone us on 01289 302391.

Alternatively you can pop into our office on Marygate. We're open to the public 10am-4pm, Monday to Friday.

Contact Northumberland County Council (NCC)

If you have a question about NCC services you can speak to someone in person in the Library on Walkergate on Tuesday and Friday 10:00am-1:00pm or telephone NCC on 0345 600 6400.